

Treasuring Christ Above All Luke 14:25-33

Have you ever bought something you thought was a great deal, only to find out later that really wasn't the case? Maybe you got talked into buying something and then found out there were problems that weren't disclosed to you or there was something in the fine print that came back to haunt you.

That kind of happened with one of the cars we bought. A couple years ago we were looking for a car for Sophia after she got her license. Amy found one on Facebook in New Richmond that had low miles and was a decent price, so we went to check it out and take it for a test drive. Everything seemed to work well, there was no rust, and it seemed like a solid car. The lady even dropped the price by \$800. So we decided to buy it.

We signed the title and got the keys, and as I was backing out of the driveway, the lady came out one more time and said, "I forgot to mention that every once in a while there's kind of a lurch in the engine. It was like that from the time we bought it but never gave us any problems."

Excuse me? Didn't you think that was worth mentioning before we signed the title? I didn't say anything, but I wasn't very happy. I was even less happy when about a mile down the road we experienced the lurch for the first time, and it was a pretty solid lurch! All of a sudden I wasn't feeling so good about this great deal. "Is this thing going to need a new transmission?!" I tried to get it to lurch again, but it didn't, so I just kept driving home, and hoped it wouldn't be a problem.

But there was another surprise. The other thing she failed to mention was that it had an oil leak. We began to notice a small puddle of oil on our driveway, right underneath where we park the car. It wasn't a lot, but again, isn't that something you should mention before selling someone your car?

Now, the Impala, which we affectionately refer to as "the blueberry" has ended up being a great car. Other than the power window breaking recently we haven't had any problems besides the occasional lurch and oil stains on the driveway. But it still bugs me that we weren't told about those things up front.

None of us like surprises like that. We want to know what we're getting into so we can decide whether or not we're going to move forward.

Well in the passage we're going to look at this morning we're going to see that Jesus was exactly the opposite of the lady that sold us the car. He didn't keep anything hidden about what life was going to be like for those who decided to follow him. There was no fine print. In fact, one might argue that he went too far in the other direction. He wanted people to know up front what they were getting into.

It's a characteristic that modern churches and modern Christianity hasn't adopted very well – at least in America. When we invite people to become Christians, we tell them all the good news – how Jesus can save them, how much he can help them, and how wonderful heaven is going to be someday. “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” But we typically leave out some of the fine print. We want it to be easy for people to receive Christ.

Have you run into any surprises yet? You may have become a Christian without knowing exactly what you were getting into, but today's passage will definitely take the blinders off. It will probably come across as shocking and confusing. It's a hard teaching that we need to grapple with and try to understand so we can see what it means for us today and what it will look like if we decide to move forward and continue to follow Christ.

Jesus is in the final phase of ministry before going to the cross. He's in Perea with his disciples, busy doing evangelism, and here's the message he gave to the crowd that was checking him out...

Read Luke 14:25-33.

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what

king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Now, if you were one of Jesus' disciples and he asked you to preview this message, what would you say? "You're going to turn everyone away!" This has to be one of the hardest teachings of Jesus in the whole Bible. There are other passages that sound very demanding for anyone who wants to be a follower of Christ, but this one tops the list. If you read this at face value from the perspective we're coming from, it sounds like Jesus is making it impossible to be one of his disciples. Hate your family? Hate your life? Renounce everything you have? How is that even possible? Are we all supposed to become single missionaries or monks for the rest of our lives?

It even sounds like he's contradicting the gospel. Jesus himself said: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" Isn't that all there is to it? Don't we just have to believe? How can he now say that we also have to hate everyone in our family and renounce everything we have? And what about his command that we love one another – even our enemies? Aren't we supposed to at least love our own family members?! What about Paul's teaching that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church?

When you get to a passage like this that's so confusing and seems so contradictory, you need to stop, and study, and figure it out because there's a lot on the line. To understand this passage, I think you have to understand two things. The first is the usage of the word "hate." When we think of "hate," we think of "despise." Anytime we use the word "hate," it brings up the idea of despising or detesting something. But in the Greek language, it meant more than that. According to Biblehub.org, the word used for hate means: "*to detest (on a comparative basis); hence, denounce; to love someone or something less than someone (something) else, i.e. to renounce one choice in favor of another.*" So it has to do with degrees of preference. You can really like something, but if something else comes along that you like a lot more, and you choose that instead, you are actually "hating" the other thing.

A biblical example is Jacob and his two wives. Jacob ended up marrying two sisters – Leah and Rachel. I won't go into detail about how that happened, but I do want you to see that in Genesis 29:30 it says: *“he loved Rachel more than Leah.”* I also want you to see that in the very next verse it says: *“When the Lord saw that Leah was hated...”* In our minds we think, “Wait a minute, I thought Jacob just didn't love her as much as Rachel.” We see lesser love and hate as two different things, but for them it could be the same.

So Jesus wasn't saying they had to despise a spouse, parents, children, siblings, or their own lives in order to be his disciple, but they did have to love them less than they loved him. They would have to choose him first and prefer him over anything else. That ties in directly with what he said in Matthew 10:37: *“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* We have to love Jesus more than our family members, which, in the biblical context, means we “hate” them when compared to our love for him. He must be first.

So that helps. It's not quite as harsh as it sounds at first. But it's still confusing. Why would he say something like that to a bunch of people who were excited to follow him? Shouldn't he save that for later on? The second thing I think we need to see to help make sense of this is the situation those people were in. Jesus was very popular and people were flocking to him like a celebrity – ready to jump on the bandwagon. In their eyes, following Jesus would have been wonderful because if he was the Messiah, he was going to make everything better for them. They could finally rise up from their oppression and enjoy peace and prosperity. But Jesus knew things were going to be a lot different for those who followed him, and he didn't want to hide that from them. He knew that persecution would soon be coming.

We read about that in the book of Acts. It began with the disciples who were arrested and beaten on different occasions. Then, a follower of Christ named Stephen, was actually put to death by being brutally stoned. And then a wave of severe persecution broke out that affected everyone who followed Christ. Acts 8:1-3 says: *“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great*

lamentation over him.³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Saul himself, who later became the Apostle Paul, gave an account of what happened in Acts 26:9-11: *“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”*

Things got really bad for Christians in Israel and Jesus knew it was coming. So throughout his ministry, he warned people about it. He didn't hide the fact that they would be hated and betrayed by their religious and governing authorities – even their own neighbors. But you know who else would reject and betray them? Their very own family members.

In Matthew 10:21-22 he warned his disciples: *“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death,²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.”* In verse 36 he says, *“A person's enemies will be those of his own household.”* In Luke 21:16-17 he told his disciples: *“You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake.”*

Persecution was coming and those who followed him would not only be rejected and betrayed by their communities, but also their own family members. They would lose their jobs, money, homes, and property. They would have to flee and relocate. So as the people of Perea flocked to him to jump on his bandwagon, he didn't beat around the bush. He wanted them to count the cost. He likened it to a man building a tower and a king facing the possibility of war. Don't jump into something without knowing what you're getting into. Many of the people he was talking to would have to choose between him and their family, life, and belongings. In that way they would have to “hate” their family and life – love them less than him – and renounce all they had or they couldn't be his disciples. That's what they were facing because of the reality of persecution.

I hope that helps you understand why Jesus said these things. But now we have to ask ourselves, what does this mean for us? We don't have persecution like they did. Most of us won't be rejected by a spouse, parent, child or sibling for following Christ. Most of us won't be fired from our jobs and have to flee and leave everything behind. We can follow Christ and keep all these things. So what does this teaching have to do with us?

Based on our context, I think he would say something a little different. I think he would say, "If there's anything in your life that you love more than me and would choose to hold onto instead of me, you cannot be my disciple."

We aren't being forced to choose between Christ and our jobs, homes, possessions or families. We can enjoy them and still follow Christ. But the danger for us is that because we can have and enjoy them, they can become our greatest love instead of Christ. And he is not ok with that. He said in Matthew 10:37: *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* He would say the same for anything – husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, career, home, land, hobby, money...

When a man who loved his wealth and possessions most of all came to Jesus, seeking eternal life, Jesus told him in Mark 10:21-22: *"You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* ²² *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.* The man loved his possessions more than Christ and he couldn't be his disciple. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24-25 *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."* And again, he would say the same for anything.

You might wonder: How can this be? Doesn't this contradict the gospel? If we're saved by grace through faith, does it really matter that much if we love something more than him? I don't think it contradicts the gospel, but I do think it clarifies it. We like to simplify the gospel into something like: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That's very true and that's the gospel, but there's more to it than that. When someone is truly saved, they are given a new heart and a new spirit inside them. They don't just make a mental decision to believe in Jesus,

there's a spiritual transformation that happens. They are a "new creation." The Holy Spirit is living in them.

They believe in Jesus, but they also experience a change of heart. They experience a new love for Christ and need to connect with him. They experience less satisfaction with the things of the world – as good as they can be – and they need something more. They need Christ. Jesus explained this heart transformation in two short parables in Matthew 13:44-45: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."*⁴⁵ *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."*

Because of the transformation that God does in our hearts, we have a new desire and need for Christ that outweighs any other love. Those who are truly born again and Christ's disciples, will grow to love him more than anything else. He will be their greatest treasure. There may be times when other things take first place, but God will bring them back where they need to be – he always does. Therefore, the person who loves other things more than Christ and would choose to hold on to them instead of Christ, cannot be his disciple.

If you're here this morning and this teaching is pricking at your heart because you can see that the things you love in this world have become more important than Jesus, I encourage you to come before him in prayer. Confess to him where your heart is at and ask him to fan into flame your passion for Christ. We need his Spirit to bring this about.

And then, take some steps to cooperate with the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in your heart and fan into flame your love for Christ. The most important thing we can do is focus on treasuring Christ in our lives – spending time in prayer and worship. Have you set aside time to meet with the Lord lately? To read his Word, listen to his voice, and abide in him? We need to make that a daily occurrence.

We also need to watch out for those things that can become idols and bring them into their proper place. When things become too important in our lives we need to make some changes. Some things need to be decreased or pushed aside for a

while (certain possessions and pastimes). Other things can't be (like family or work or home) but need to be yielded regularly to God. Look at all the things you enjoy as gifts from him that he's given not only to enjoy, but to use to glorify him. Give thanks for your family members that you love so dearly, praise God for them, and glorify him by the way you treat them. It should be evident to all, that as much as you love your family, Christ is your true treasure. The same applies with your job, home, possessions, hobbies, and so on.

By God's grace we will treasure Christ above all things and experience him as our greatest joy, fulfillment, and passion in life.